

Zen Bow

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ILLNESS & PRACTICE

Zen Bow: Illness & Practice

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Victor Krynicki

Sickness as Demon, Sickness as Guide

ROSHI BODHIN KJOLHEDE

Buddhist texts say that when he was twenty-nine Siddhartha Gautama encountered sickness, old age, and death for the first time. But how could he have reached that age without experiencing sickness himself? He couldn't have, of course, and in the generationally integrated family structure of India he almost certainly had also seen the aged and the dead up close.

As with the other great stories of the world's religions, the truth of this one, the tipping point in the life of the young prince, lies not in the literal facts of the account but in the meaning behind it. Although he had undoubtedly gone through the usual illnesses of childhood and youth, and heard about, if not seen, old age and death, the significance of these universal trials of sentient existence had not hit home for him.

Suddenly now, he had realized that suffering was embedded in the human condition.

The self-made spiritual teacher Gurdjieff reportedly once said, 'Every young man should get very sick once.' He may have singled out young men because with their batteries of testosterone fully charged at that age, they tend to be the more rash of the sexes—that is, even less concerned about sickness, injury, old age, and death than young women. But for either sex, these matters generally are not on the radar of youth.

In the Kjolhede household, sickness was little more than a word. Aside from our mother's routine childbirths, neither of our parents ever spent a night in a hospital until they died, both of them at age ninety. It was much the same for the rest of us six siblings—just the occasional

cold and flu. By the time I graduated from high school, I had gone six years without missing a day of school (a record that is somewhat sickening in itself, to be sure).

This run of good karma—and the sense of exceptionalism that came with it—ran out when at age thirty-six I was stricken with hepatitis. And all because I had felt compelled to stop for a dip on my way home from Mexico.

It was a hot day and I was on my way to the Mexico City airport at the end of a 2-week stay without having gone swimming. There was just enough time to swing by the Stevens' place for a swim in their beautiful pool. Helen Stevens was the landowner who'd rented her guest house to Roshi Kapleau, Polly Pappageorge (the Center staff member who cooked for him) and me for various periods of time over the course of several years while working on one or another of his books in Mexico.

When I got to the pool at the Stevens' main house, I was surprised to see, for the first time ever, some half dozen gringos sunbathing on the lawn around it—and surprised all the more that no one was swimming. 'Why was no one in the water?' I asked the host. When told that the filter was out of order, I glanced at the brown water and snorted, 'Why, I've been in dirtier water than this plenty of times in swimming holes in Michigan!' I then dove in, swam around for a while to cool off, and after changing clothes continued on to the airport.

One day about two weeks later, while working at the Center, a deep fatigue crept over me. I ignored it (tiredness is not an unusual feeling on staff), but by the next day it had gotten even worse, until suddenly I couldn't find the energy to even speak. I had run completely out of gas. My assistant in the zendo office at the time, Vajran, looked at me with alarm and commented that I had turned yellow. I went to bed, and Dr. Gibbs, from next door, kindly came to examine me. After a few gentle pokes in my midsection, he cheerfully announced, 'You've got it— hepatitis.' And with that he returned to his waiting patients.

My own doctor confirmed that I had indeed contracted Hepatitis A, and added that the diagnosis of an infectious disease had to be reported to the county health department. When I called them, to my surprise their first question was, 'Have you been swimming recently in water that might have been contaminated?' Why yes, as a matter of fact, but not with my mouth open. 'A single drop at the corner of your mouth can do it.' (They also urged us at the Zen Center to get an automatic dishwasher, something we've been using ever since.)

Blood tests revealed that mine was a severe case, but there was little in the way of treatment, I learned, other than complete bed rest. I also learned that although symptoms usually don't appear for the first two weeks after infection, one is still contagious during that initial fortnight. So as I lay in bed absorbing this sobering news, I was also stricken with concern as to whom I may have unwittingly transmitted this liver disease. I rewound my mental cassette (this was before CDs), searching for any close contact I may have had with others. Oh yes, there was that moment when I'd shared a spoonful of mango I'd brought back from Mexico with a Sangha member who'd happened by my room. The memory of my passing Esther that little scoop of mango on the same spoon I'd been using, and the look of delight (ironically!) as she tasted it, now festered in me. If I did give her the disease, whom might she then have passed it on to by now? What hath I wrought? With a heavy heart I managed to contact her to alert her to what she could be facing. She was alarmed, but to my great relief neither she nor anyone else ever came down with the sickness.

My exhaustion in those initial weeks of the illness was beyond anything I could have imagined. I had only enough energy to walk the few steps to the bathroom. During my twenty-four hours a day in bed I realized by contrast how much energy we have available to us in our normal functioning. It occurred to me that whereas a healthy human being quietly burns as though with the fuel of a furnace, my own fires now had

been reduced to the little pilot light of that furnace. It was as though, in the words of Zen master Hakuin, I had been ‘struck down by some unknown demon.’

Now and then someone would bring flowers. Flowers! They had never meant much to me before, but now offered displays of life-affirming color in my little room, bursts of vibrant energy that lasted for days. They laughed reassuringly at my condition, radiating joyous well-being. They were unafraid of contagion. They became my dear friends.

I felt increasingly at odds from the energetic tempo of the training regimen around me. There was always someone to bring me food, but most staff, as I remember, kept their distance. I began to realize that they, not unreasonably, were afraid to visit me. One day a staff member assigned to clean my bathroom walked smartly into my room, hugging the wall farthest from me. She was wearing thick, black rubber gloves that came up to the elbow. It was a demoralizing sight. I was starting to feel like a leper.

In Japan, I’ve been told, disease seems always to have been viewed as something vaguely shameful, even in Zen. This may have been especially so with contagious diseases such as tuberculosis. TB was common enough in the Zen monasteries of old, but still carried a stigma. Some biographers now believe that even such illustrious masters as Dogen, Bankei, and Hakuin suffered from it, but in neither their stories nor those of other teachers do we find mention of any specific diseases.

In Japan today, another disease apparently not to be spoken of is Alzheimer’s. I know of two contemporary Japanese teachers afflicted with it whose students publicly disavow the diagnosis. What accounts for this longstanding reticence—if not secrecy—in Japanese Zen about sickness? Part of it is cultural. Asians generally are less inclined than Westerners to share details of their personal lives, especially in medical matters. They are also more respectful of authority, and Zen students have often sanitized information about their teachers in the inter-

ests of preserving their inspirational status. But this censoring can also preserve mixed-up ideas about spirituality.

Westerners who hear nothing about the sicknesses or other physiological problems (or emotional vulnerabilities) of Zen teachers can too easily idealize them, imagining that they somehow have transcended such ‘weaknesses.’ I have seen Sangha members dismayed to learn that Roshi Kapleau had Parkinson’s disease. ‘I would have thought that he had got past such a thing,’ one murmured. Let’s see, then—past physical decline and other natural laws? Past sickness, old age, and death? Do they also think that the enlightened person doesn’t bleed when he’s cut? Zen practice frees us from attachment to the body, it doesn’t leave us disembodied.

Although most biographies of the masters reveal little about the specific causes of their deaths, these chronicles do sometimes go into vivid detail about the sicknesses that they battled and overcame. One of the most dramatic of these was that of Bankei. He spent years fiercely struggling with his natural koan, ‘What is bright virtue?’ until out of desperation he sealed himself inside a tiny hut and did zazen day and night. Finally, weakened both physically and mentally, he contracted tuberculosis. In a Dharma talk years later, he tells of it himself:

My utter neglect of health ... and the years of physical punishment finally took its toll, and came to a head in a serious illness ... My condition steadily worsened, I grew weaker and weaker by the day. Whenever I spat, gouts of bloody sputum as big as thumbheads appeared. The illness reached a critical stage.

His physician now gave up on him, and Bankei was resigned to dying. But suddenly he came to deep enlightenment, realizing that ‘all things are perfectly resolved in the Unborn.’

Days after the diagnosis of my own, less serious illness, the visit of one Sangha member to my room left me wishing he’d never come. He entered with a grave expression and haltingly told me that the worst thing about hepatitis was that ‘the liver never regenerates.’ He had learned

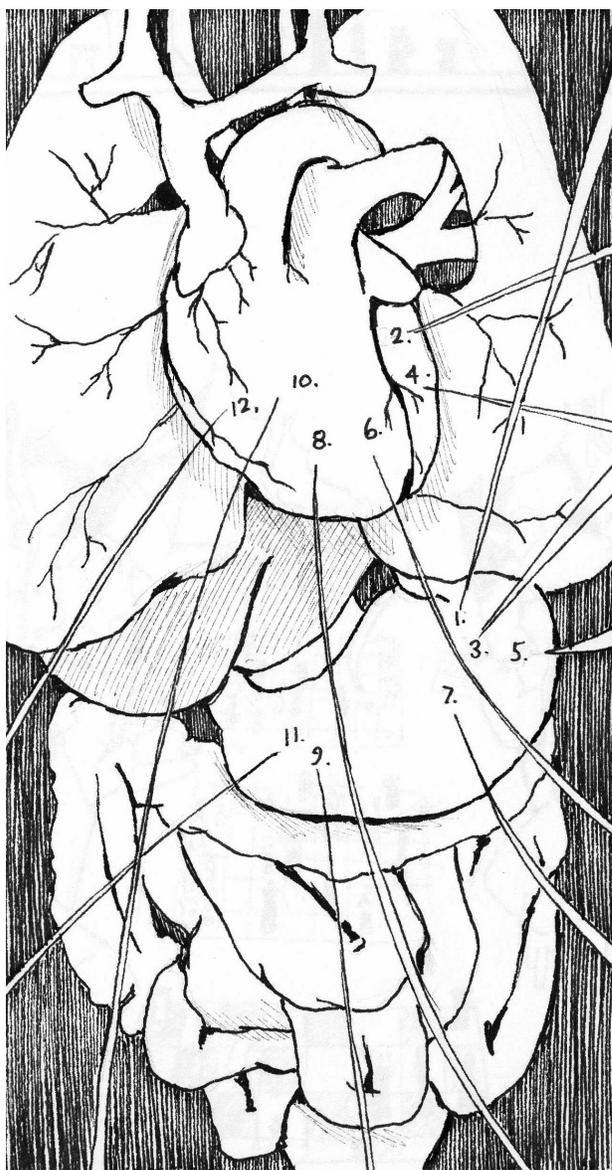
that, he said, while going through it himself. I later found out that the truth was the very opposite—even a much damaged liver can regenerate completely. But he had left me in a state of gloom.

All at once the prospect of death, although not imminent, had become real. It's not that I'd never reflected on 'the certainty of death and the uncertainty of the time of death,' to use a phrase from the old Zen texts. The matter of mortality had weighed on me in my earlier years of practice, doing much to fuel my sitting. But this was different. Now I knew, through direct experience, the *link* between health and death—sickness! Now I had *incorporated* it.

My previous assumption (barely conscious) that I would enjoy splendid health extending far into the future had now been fractured. Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, I once heard, said that when we stumble and fall, we die. In the same sense, when we're felled by illness our self-structure cannot remain fully intact. It is a blow to the ego and its myth of sovereignty.

Sickness exposes the limits of this body-mind complex we call 'self,' and even more so, it seems, than injury does (or at least common injuries). A broken bone or sprain or laceration affects a discrete body part, and we can still feel mentally strong while recovering. Illness depletes us mentally as well as physically. Once the sick person's defenses have been breached by the virus or bacteria, it's harder to maintain the conceit of himself as a separate agent who's in charge of things. He feels 'not himself,' and with this vague experience of dislocation he edges toward a sense of no-self, one of Buddhism's 'Three Characteristics of Existence.' Another of these, 'suffering,' is certainly obvious to the sick person, and the third, 'impermanence,' is almost as hard to deny, for having succumbed to his condition, he is confronted by his conditioned nature—his subjection to the law of change.

Since our very nature is the Dharma, whether sick or not we are all manifesting the truths of suffering, impermanence, and no-self. But



Sophie Argetsinger

in sickness these announce themselves more loudly. Roused from our normal state of languid routine and daily life assumptions, we're all but forced to see things differently. Sydney Smith, a 19th-century British clergyman and essayist, observed, 'There is not the least use preaching to anyone unless you chance to catch them ill.' This is why I always look forward to visiting people in the hospital. I have no interest in 'preaching' to them, or in merely cheering them up. The draw for me is the openness in them,

perhaps even the wonder, that comes with their newly-felt vulnerability. In the end, the most I or any visitor can offer the sick person is our full, respectful presence. This will create the space in which she can feel free to talk or not, and we to respond accordingly.

To be bedridden is to experience the Dharma in another of its forms—the teaching of interdependence. The sick person, incapacitated to one degree or another, must rely on others to provide nursing services, meals, pharmacy runs, and other acts of kindness. This dependency may leave the patient grateful or embarrassed or even resentful, but also relieved of some of the prideful sense of self-sufficiency that often accompanies longstanding good health and ability.

Hakuin, who as a young man endured crippling bouts of physical and emotional distress, knew well the leveling effect of illness. *The Zen Master Hakuin*, translated by Philip Yampolsky, presents a letter from Hakuin to a sick monk in which he seems to speak from experience in describing the suffering of ‘those who are sensitive.’ Linking illness to mental dis-ease, he writes, ‘... they think continually of events of the past or wonder about the future. They complain about the qualities of those who are caring for them; they resent not hearing from old friends who are far away. They regret not having achieved fame in their own lifetimes and dread the pains of the long night that will follow their deaths. They pray to the gods and are infuriated that there is no immediate response. When they lie down and close their eyes they may seem comfortably in repose, yet within their breasts a fierce battle rages and within their minds they suffer more severely than the beings in the three evil ways.’ ‘Such people,’ he adds, ‘are not killed by sickness but rather are eaten up by deluded thoughts.’

If the sick monk who received Hakuin’s letter lost heart at reading these words, he needed only to have turned the page to find Hakuin spurring him on: ‘For effective meditation nothing is better than practice while one is ill.’ A sick monk,

Hakuin points out, avoids the difficult tasks of his ordinary life. ‘Like a cat or dog bowing to circumstance, he need not comprehend things nor make decisions.’ As Head of Zendo at the time of my illness, I had been charged with arrangements for a symposium on world peace that the Center was about to host, but suddenly, overnight, the job was out of my hands. I now felt not only helpless, but somewhat guilty that others suddenly had to pick up the many pieces of my responsibilities. No doubt these are feelings that weigh on many who abruptly find themselves sidelined by illness or injury. It’s another way in which illness takes its toll.

Most likely I had heard Roshi read this letter from Hakuin to the sick monk aloud in teisho, but now that I was the sick monk I don’t remember being galvanized to practice. It was one thing for Hakuin, a spiritual titan, to use his sickness to further his practice, but I wasn’t there yet. I related more to the words Hakuin attributes in his letter to a sick old priest (but which were quite possibly his own): ‘I could not summon even a small part of my strength, and only deluded thoughts and pain were left.’ I couldn’t even sit upright, and I was feeling increasingly out of my element in this environment of vigorous training. I realized that a Zen training center is not the place for long-term convalescence.

One day Roshi came to my room to visit—something I’d never imagined him doing. I summoned up my courage and began stammering that I was feeling I couldn’t get the kind of rest I needed at the Center, when suddenly I began choking up. Why? It involved a feeling of shame, somehow, but at what? Had I ‘failed’ the Center? Failed him? My emotional reaction left me chagrined—and more aware than ever of the inseparability of body and mind. It’s only natural that when the body is compromised we find ourselves emotionally vulnerable.

Roshi readily agreed that I needed to go elsewhere to recuperate, and by the next day my sisters in Santa Fe had found a house there where

I could stay. I would have it to myself, but could count on visitors when I wanted. It sounded like an ideal set-up for convalescing—as it did prove to be.

I spent the next two and a half months in my Southwest sanctuary, the first half of that time in bed. The solitude and the stillness of the place were a welcome change from the hard-charging bustle of the Zen Center. Holding strictly to my prescribed dietary restrictions—no fats or oils

of any kind, and of course no alcohol—slowly I regained my strength. I began to read again, and then to work with some light weights to restore the muscle mass I'd lost. When I returned to Rochester I was rejuvenated and eager to re-enter the training regimen.

A year later, follow-up blood tests yielded the numbers of a healthy liver. But I would never again take flowers for granted.

Zen Mind, Cancer Mind

JONATHAN HAGER

Hazy lights and shadows enter my consciousness. I awake in the recovery room from an anesthetic coma to distantly hear my wife sobbing the tears of profound loss—'You have cancer.' Time stops for an instant; one instant is ten thousand years. The worst ten thousand years ever. I try to absorb the fact that my routine gallbladder surgery was a horrible misdiagnosis. My physician-trained brain instantly processes the fact that I have numerous tumors in my liver. Metastases—incurable—death—my girls—wife. How can this be happening? Time fast forwards on triple speed. Thoughts pour into my mind—incessant, pounding, turbulent and relentless. No one can stop the flow, except me.

I am a beginner. Though I had done yoga for many years, the meditation mostly consisted of *shavasana* at the end of an exhausting workout. It seems ironic that the only meditation I had done was the 'Corpse Pose,' as it is translated from the Sanskrit. 'Meditating' after doing yoga was very easy, relaxing and recovering from a tough work out. I would soon learn how hard meditation really is. I spent the next month or two searching for every available treatment for a disease that would prove to be rare even among rare cancers. I traveled to Boston, Pitts-

burgh, and Houston. Someone, please, give me answers. Give me hope. Visiting the specialists' specialist was an exercise in desperation and hope-seeking. Ultimately, it was an exercise in running from reality; not wanting to accept what is. I have cancer. In the present moment, there is no cure. This led to acupuncture, massage therapy, and Qi Gong. I am pulling out all the stops. In the Qi Gong, I found hope and a sense of purpose—I could do something about this beast inside me. I could try, I could act, I could change the future. Qi Gong meditation is very active and purpose driven. The student attempts to direct healing energy around the body by focusing the mind's eye in the desired location, with a goal of healing.

I needed more support in this healing-directed meditation, and so I found myself in *daisan* at the Rochester Zen Center asking about the healing meditation of Zen. Imagine my surprise when I found that there wasn't one. 'All we do is focus on the breath,' I was told.

Qi Gong meditation was much easier; my mind was focused on moving energy around to my sickly liver. I could imagine the healing energy of the universe, of trees, of waves. Now, Roshi wanted me to sit there and NOT THINK



Amaury Cruz

about anything but the breath. Okay. Inhale, one, exhale, cancer, inhale two, exhale, death. Inhale, sad, exhale, my girls. How could I possibly do this practice? Are these Zen folks crazy? Their lives are easier than mine; they must have nothing to worry about. I needed distractions from my fate, not quiet time to fester in the fetid swamp of my own thoughts. I needed sex, comedy, travel, hobbies—anything to distract me from this.

The next big step was trust. Once I started going to *dokusan*, Roshi said to practice. I ask, 'What can I read?' He tells me to not read too much—practice. Trust . . . trust . . . practice, once a week, then twice. Gradually, I could count the in and out breath to ten WITHOUT THINKING ABOUT CANCER. I came to realize this might really help. I could ease my cancerous thoughts without the powerful distractors of sex, comedy, travel or hobbies. Of course, there were constant setbacks. On days when my disease was more

symptomatic, sitting was much harder. Often I would sit for 30, 60, 90 minutes, still on the outside and thinking of the cancer the whole time on the inside. What a deception, I thought. I look like a Zen student, poised like a statue, but I don't feel like one. How to escape this? 'Practice,' says Roshi. Trust him, I think. And I do.

The focus on NOW is a monumental help when practicing while ill and dying. (I guess we all are doing this.) 'Am I dying right now?' I ask myself. 'No, so go back to the breath.' 'Am I going to die today?' 'No, go back to the breath.' 'Do I have to look at the tears in my daughters' eyes right now?' 'No, back to the breath.' 'What is good about this moment?' The dialogue continues. 'The breath is relaxing,' comes the response. This relaxation buoys the practice; I want to do more. My family, friends, and co-workers notice the calm. Eventually, I forgo the counting practice. Now it gets really hard again. Not even numbers to occupy my fragile peace.

More thoughts, more suffering. How to escape? Keeping doing it, trust, practice.

Finally, sesshin. Scared beyond belief. I am going to sit there and think about cancer for 12 hours a day! What am I doing? Well, I do think about it a lot and it is terrible. But then it happens ... surrender. I can't think about it anymore and I sit in peace. Not for long, one or two rings of the bell, maybe. The suffering comes back, but the glimpse around the corner has occurred.

I continue daily practice and move off the breath to Mu. Again, practice is hard. Mu ... cancer ... mu ... death ... I was just getting really good at the breath. I was relaxed. Why does Roshi keep setting the bar higher? 'Trust him,' I say. After a month or two of Mu, it happens one Monday night. A routine sitting, no expect-

tations, no ideas that I'm going to have a 'break-through.' Just sitting there, when mu turns into joy. A broad joy that makes me smile outwardly. The pure joy of a child on Christmas morning. I am sitting here, seemingly doing nothing, and I am profoundly joyful. The pain in my hips starts up strong and yet I feel joy. We walk *kinhin* and I feel joy. This provides a different kind of hope. No longer hoping as much (believe me, it is far from gone) for a cure. Now hoping for *kensho*. Can I bargain with my disease for more time? Do I need more time? Is it worth it to sit and sit in hopes of this when my time is limited? I think so. I trust so.

Jonathan Hager is a husband, father of two girls, 11 and 13, and a physician. He has been a member of RZC for one year and lives in Rochester.

Reflections on Illness

DEBORAH ZARETSKY

It never occurred to me that I would be 63 years old with Stage IV cancer and be a recent widow having lost my husband of 37 years shortly before my diagnosis. This was not my story. In my story, Allen and I were old people doting on our grandchildren and enjoying our adult children. It is like I turned the page in a book called *Deborah's Life*, and then suddenly I became a character in someone else's story. I have lived my life in a bubble where things like this happened to other people, not me. Stupid.

It is hard to be ill, and it is hard to be without Allen. The terrain of my life is so changed as to be unrecognizable. Of the few things that are familiar to me there is the love and support of my friends and family. I have never been in a 'helpless' position where I needed the kindness of others the way that I need them now. When

Allen was not well I tended to his needs. When I was not well he tended to mine. It has been a sea change for me, but I have come to feel that it is okay to accept the generosity of others and even ask for help, love, and comfort when I need it. Even the Buddha had to accept the bowl of sweet rice. It was his moment of grace in which even he knew he couldn't do it on his own. We need each other.

Being present has taken on a whole new meaning, as so much of what I am present to is simply not pleasant. I have been in pain a good deal of the time from operations I have had, and emotionally, I deal with fear, anxiety, and sadness, just to name a few. People say I have to 'fight' cancer, that I have to stay positive, but I have found different truths in this for myself. I have found that being present is the



Tom Kowal

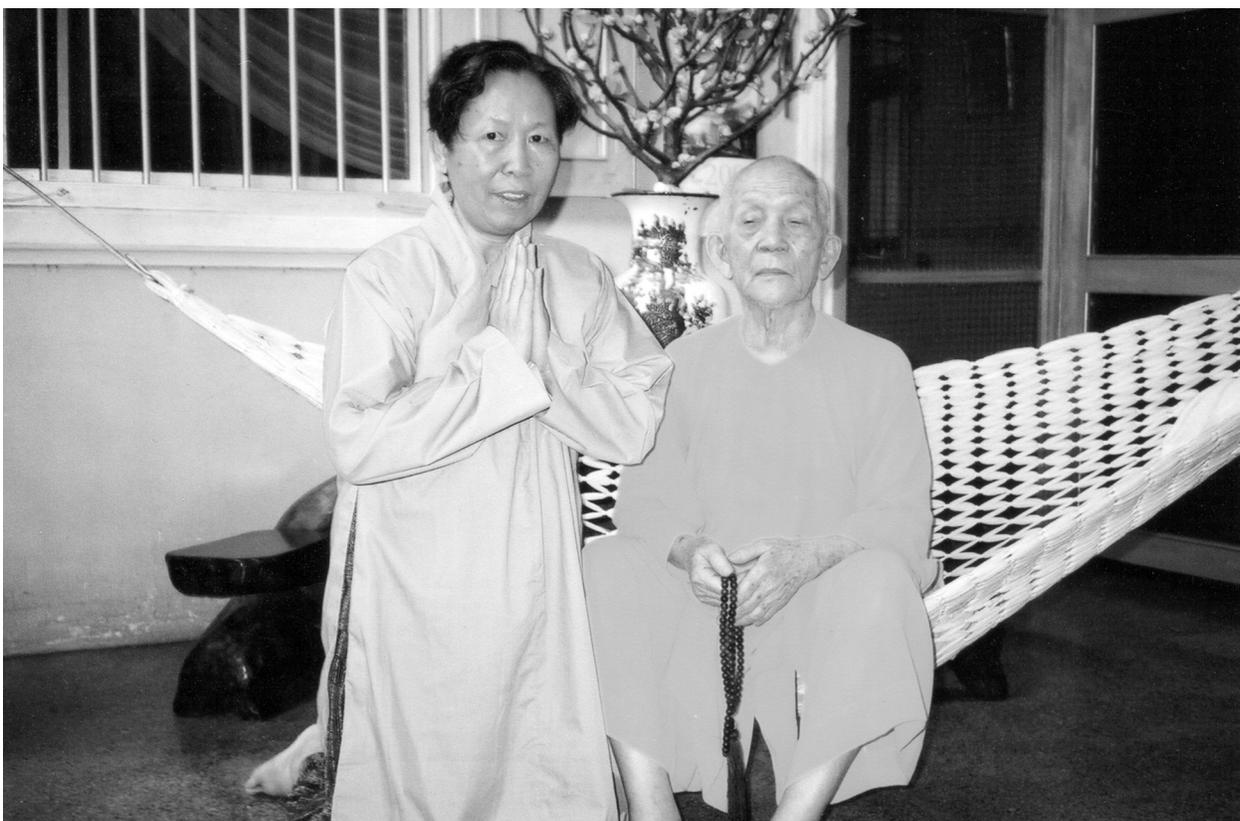
most powerful tool in dealing with the illness, as it brings me into the direct experience of what is and helps to cut through the tremendous difficulties that my thinking mind wants to generate automatically.

All of these things bring me closer to the principles that I have held close to my heart in my many years of Zen practice. At the same time, because of the nature of what I am dealing with, these principles have become infinitely magnified. For example, impermanence for me was always something very poetic—the beauty of leaves falling as the seasons change, spring bringing gardens that fragrantly flourish. And at the same time, I found myself so moved by the beauty of these things, that it was a constant reminder of life constantly changing and moving. Since my diagnosis, I feel as if I am personally the embodiment of impermanence. And,

whereas I felt inspired by watching the leaves fall, I feel a sense of dread at the thought of my liver failing. And yet, it's very powerful for me right now that Zen Buddhism always focused on the truths in life and didn't try to paint a pretty picture that bore no resemblance to the reality that we all eventually face.

All of this has opened my heart to an understanding of suffering that I had never had before, and I am grateful for this. I think that anything that increases a person's compassion is its own gift. All of this unfolds for me within the context of the Zen Center and what I have learned there. And for this, I feel tremendous gratitude for Roshi and for the Sangha that I love very much.

Deborah Zaretsky lives in Rochester and is a long-time member of the Zen Center.



Sudama meets with Hoa Thuong Thich Tri Tinh, a Buddhist monk, during her trip to Vietnam.

Commitment, the Gift of Pain

SUDAMA NGO

My path to practice began when I was a child in Vietnam and went to the Buddhist temple for the youth clubs. At that moment I wanted to be a Buddhist nun, but the time was not right yet. My path to the Rochester Zen Center began in 1996 when a woman named Vinh, a friend of my best friend, encouraged me to return to Vietnam to meet with an old monk. I was living in California at the time and had to convince my husband to allow me to travel there on my own. Despite his initial resistance, I was able to go for a month-long trip in May 1997. Upon my arrival in Vietnam, Vinh first brought me to a nursing home and a community center for blind children, where we met with some of the residents and offered gifts. Then she took me to a very old temple in the countryside to meet with the

old monk, who is still well known for translating Chinese sutras into Vietnamese. A few weeks later, before I returned to California, Vinh took me to a ceremony held at a large temple so that I could make a donation to the monk. During the ceremony, when I saw the monk walk through the temple gate alongside a nun, I was struck by how beautiful they looked in their yellow robes and kesas. Suddenly I broke into tears, and asked myself, 'Why am I standing here crying? Why don't I just find a way to live my life like they do?' Watching them from a distance filled me with sadness. In that moment I decided that I needed to find a way.

When I returned to San Diego, I took a short trip to northern California with my family to visit a cousin. Two weeks after we got back

from the family trip I became seriously ill. I was working in my tailor shop when I first felt a sharp pain in my lungs and noticed that my breathing was heavy. Later that afternoon, my husband decided to bring me to the hospital, where I was treated for pneumonia and sent home. In the days that followed, the symptoms came back and the pain got worse. Struggling to breathe and to speak, I returned to the hospital a couple more times, and each time I was sent home after receiving treatment for low oxygen levels. Then, during my next trip to the emergency room, I developed a dark red rash all over my body. The doctor decided that I needed to stay overnight for some tests and gave me pain medication through an IV tube. I had developed a fever and chills and felt like I was dying. All I could do was just lay there in the hospital bed and try to deal with the pain.

At first, the doctor couldn't come up with a diagnosis. He kept asking me questions about the places I traveled to over the past year. A few days later, he came into my room and said, 'Congratulations, we now know what's wrong!' I had contracted a fungus called *Coccidioidomycosis* or 'Valley Fever' in my lungs during my trip to northern California. The doctor gave me a strong antibiotic and kept me in the hospital to watch its effects, giving me small doses at a time to see how my body responded. After a couple of days, it became clear that my body was able to handle it so I was sent home and continued with the medicine and painkiller for a month, at which time I was told to stop taking it because of the potential for harmful side effects. But, within a couple days of going off the medication, my cough returned violently—this time with blood spewing out of my mouth. Back to the emergency room, a bone and head scan showed that the fungus was spread through my body: knees, shoulders, lower back, even my skull. For a full year, I would need to take the medication and have monthly blood tests to monitor the fungus activity. It was during this time that I became interested in reading sutras and listening to recordings of sutra chanting by the monk I had met in Vietnam. My poor

health prevented me from chanting on my own, but at least I could listen by tape.

After a couple months of listening to chanting, I found that my body began to heal little by little. When I finally had some energy to do things for myself again, I wanted to go to the temple near my home to join in the chanting. Chanting is very emotional for me; it sometimes makes me cry. When I chanted at the temple I felt like I was the strongest and loudest chanter there. After chanting, I felt exhausted, but during chanting I didn't seem to be tired. Soon I was able to go to the temple more often because I felt well enough to drive on my own. I was also able to get off of the pain medication.

After going to the local temple for almost two years every day for the evening chanting, I began to feel sad. So I started searching for other Buddhist temples, not really knowing what I was looking for.

One day I attended a different temple that offered a one-day retreat. I saw a nun who had also come to participate in the retreat and felt that I had known her for a long, long time, as if she were a close friend. A couple weeks later I saw the same nun again at a Buddhist community celebration of the Buddha's birthday. I ran up to her to find out what temple she stayed at and arranged to meet with her. When we met she told me about her meditation practice, and I told her I wanted to learn how to do meditation. I told her about my illness, which still affected me. The nun offered to teach me how to sit and showed me a photograph of her teacher. When I saw the picture of Bodhin-sensei with Roshi Kapleau together, my body froze. I just knew in that moment that Bodhin-sensei was the teacher I was searching for.

I started to sit with the nun once a week and sat on my own every morning. First ten and then fifteen minutes, then a half hour, and, after a couple of months, finally I could sit for an hour. One morning a poem came to me when I was sitting; it was about entering a gate of practice, looking for who I was. When I showed it to the nun she offered to arrange for me to visit the Rochester Zen Center. After difficulty plan-

WHO AM I?

*One winter morning
I walked through the Zen Gate
To search for an answer
Where did I come from?
And who am I?*

*Suddenly there are flower clusters
Appearing and disappearing.
It is very serene
On a pure white wall.
Oh! I suddenly realize
I am like a piece of white paper
Now tainted with dust.*

—SUDAMA NGO,
OCTOBER 6, 2000

ning the trip due to a recurrence of my illness, resistance from my husband, and other things that got in the way, I was finally able to go in May 2002, and it was the time of the Buddha's birthday!

As soon as I stepped through the Center's front door, at that moment I knew that I was home. I attended the workshop led by Bodhin-sensei and returned a few months later for a couple of weeks of training and my first seven-day sesshin.

One afternoon before the sesshin, I was sitting in the zendo at Arnold Park, and suddenly I saw a big black hole in front of me. I was standing at the edge of it and was so scared that I would fall inside that I started screaming and crying loudly in the zendo. Amala-sensei (then Head of Zendo) came to calm me down and took me into the Oak Room. I was still shaking, so I went to the dorm to lay down and get some rest. I felt so confused and didn't know what was wrong. I was drawn to the practice but I was also very frightened of this experience.

When I returned to California, my life felt empty. I didn't want to stay with my family; I just wanted to go back to the Center. But I was still sick and had to rely on the support of my husband. At this time it felt like my body was in California, but my mind was at the Center. After a year or two of traveling back and forth between California and Rochester, I finally was able to end my marriage and move to the Center.

After being on staff for a while, it seemed like my health and my family problems had finally stabilized and I could go further. It felt like everything had been resolved, and I went to ask Roshi to make me a priest. He said, 'We need to talk.' Roshi asked me many questions, and finally he said, 'Okay, I will do the novice ceremony for you.' Then suddenly, one day I felt very sick again. The symptoms were not the same as what I had experienced with the fungus. This time it was extreme abdominal pain and digestive problems. I went to see a doctor who prescribed medicine that made the symptoms worse. (Later I found out that the diagnosis was wrong.) I kept the sitting and work schedule the best I could, even though I was exhausted from not being able to sleep at night. One night the pain was so sharp that I said to myself, 'Okay. This is so painful, I give up. I am ready to die.' But I also had the feeling that if I stayed in the Center right then I could not die because I was surrounded by bodhisattvas. During this painful period, I saw many doctors and many tests



Sudama offers gifts to children at a local community center in Vietnam.

were done, but nothing was ever found to be wrong. After sitting and listening to chanting, I always felt much better and eventually the pain did go away with the help of acupuncture and Chinese herbs. At the same time my commitment to serving the Center and the Three Treasures deepened further and on February 11, 2012, I committed myself to the Buddhist priesthood, to coming to awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings.

I am truly grateful for all the sickness. Without the pain and the support of family, friends, and Sangha, I would not have been able to go beyond the obstacles that kept me from taking the steps to live my true commitment to this practice.

An ordained priest, Sudama Ngo lives and works at the Rochester Zen Center.



Amaury Cruz

I Am Not Brave

TERRYN MAYBECK

When I was diagnosed with cancer I lost control of my life.

Ovarian cancer. The struggle has begun but it's not a fight. I am not brave. I am strapped against my will into the seat of a rollercoaster going on the worst ride of my life. I pray that at the end of this stomach sickening, muscle-aching, flu-like jaunt, I will survive and step out onto solid ground.

I try to keep a positive attitude but I often fall short. A positive attitude gives you strengthening vibes like cheerleaders on the sidelines. During each chemo round, I plunge down into the depths of pain then rise slowly, slowly back up.

Simple pleasures are magnified. I step out of my car, walk through the grass in bare feet and feel each damp tendril brush through my toes.

I watch an ant carry a seed across the sidewalk. I take in the deep aromas of every flower I walk by and snuggle with my neighbor's toddlers.

I'm nauseous.

I'm angry that every walk and fundraiser is for breast cancer. I'm jealous that breasts have emotional support groups but ovaries do not.

I remember the last time I drove my car before my first chemo. I spent all day finishing last minute errands getting ready for the long trip that would take me far away from reality. I savored every minute; the freedom washed over me, the breeze from my window sweeping long hair into my eyes.

Now, I am in a fish bowl struggling to keep my head above water. My friends watch me from outside. They wiggle their fingers at me

through the glass, tossing me bits of food, plants or a magazine before they go back to their own lives. Some stay away, uncertain what to do or what to say. Others only send cards, even if they live nearby.

Visitors. Some visitors really just come to see what cancer is about. Friends and family work through their own feelings of mortality through me, you can see it mirrored in their eyes. Others are lifelines to the outside and share stories of normalcy. Those are my favorite visitors. They bring me into their lives.

I hold no grudge as they work on their own sense of mortality. It's not always pretty. Bald head, bald brows, bald eyelashes. Emaciation. Pallid face.

I feel like an alien from a 1950s movie.

Hair, or lack of it, oddly gives me a sense of relief. My hair follicles actually hurt from the weight. A dear friend trims my hair into a pixie. Days later when I look in the mirror, I see a bald spot has appeared overnight on one side of my head like a baby losing its first-born hair.

Exhaustion. Lethargy. Cancer sucks the life out of me.

A year after my first cancer bout, I was dealing with debilitating neuropathy and depression as post side effects from sudden menopause. No western doctors could help. I tried acupuncture treatments and the symptoms quickly departed.

Soon after, I discovered Zen meditation and Buddhist teaching.

I remember when I was going through difficult emotional times. I found great solace in meditation. I felt a transformation that affected the way I dealt with daily stress. It was like walking through a different world, issues were non-issues. I marveled at the simple beauties of life. Life was good.

Cancer returns. The neuropathy and flu-like symptoms are the same but different. My lows are lower and my highs are higher. The pain is

more intense, but I stay clear-minded and more active on good days.

Armed with knowledge of reiki, acupuncture, of Zen meditation and Buddhist teaching, I work my way through the emotional and medical maze, finding ways to deal with unbearable side effects.

Operations, chemo, painful side effects; my life and Zen practice crumbled down all around me. It was easy to meditate when I was feeling well but impossible to meditate when I hit bottom. It reminds me of the old adage 'life is easy until it gets tough.'

Pain overwhelms me, clouds my inner vision.

Illness, pain and facing death have an immense effect on practicing a Zen life. I learn experientially and instinctively this time around. I have finally found ways to deal with my pain. I meditate for short five-minute durations of time while lying flat on my bed, and I listen to the cadence and timber of a visitors voice. On better days, I work creatively in my studio or organize my favorite community project for the needy.

Friends say I am heroic for helping others while I am going through this personal crisis. I say it is what helps me survive. When you are mindful of other people's needs, there is no time to dwell on yourself.

With two mutated chromosomes, I can only see more bouts of cancer in my future unless researchers find a cure. Facing death is not my main struggle but accepting the cycles of pain and misery that may follow me through the rest of my life.

This is the most difficult mountain that I must climb.

Terryn Maybeck is an artist, photographer, and devoted community volunteer. She has been an RZC member since 2011, and recently discovered her cancer is in remission.

North to South, West to East (Part I)

ANONYMOUS

The mind of the great sage of India is intimately conveyed from West to East.

Though humans may be sharp or dull the way has no northern or southern ancestors.

—*The Harmony of Relative and Absolute*

The Dream

Between night and day-break the Spanish call 'por la madrugada.' There doesn't seem to be a great translation for this phrase into English other than 'at the crack of dawn' or 'in the small hours.' Let's just call it somewhere in between ... night and day.

Por la madrugada after my birthday I entered into an extraordinary dream like none experienced since childhood. I found myself inside a series of open aired villa style rooms similar to those you may see in an Italian countryside mixing with olives and red cobblestones. Except these villas had no roofs or much interior at all but looked bare and boxy and stark. Meandering in and out of the villas stood a long row of bleach-white statues stretching endlessly into the distance. I explored one of the terribly sparse rooms and found a chilling game taking place among the statues. Every time I left a room a statue would seek me out, hunt me down ... and grab on tightly. Every time I turned to stone and became another statue in the line. The same scene repeated, coming back to life and turning to stone, until I desperately made a run for it over a villa wall. Scaling the wall at last and at its apex, I once again turned to find another statue on my tail. This time though instead of grabbing me right away it stopped for a few words of advice. It said, 'You have to find love. ...' It paused for impact as it coldly searched my eyes. Right before it lunged again, I noticed the

statues oddly resembled me; each one a descendant of a dimly remembered life. They stretched on and on by the thousands or more these vestiges of myself. Then it grabbed me. I awoke from the dream sobbing uncontrollably, clutching my heart and mid-body; in between dream and wakefulness. The dream ended a couple of days before boarding a plane for sesshin.



Sesshin

Luckily, it was a totally uneventful flight from Madison to Detroit and then on to Rochester. The route from West to East wasn't always that forgiving as any airline passenger knows these days. It can be a patience-testing crapshoot at best to reach your destination the same day, especially with one or more transfers. The image of those statues loomed, and I approached sesshin with a kind of make or break abandon that felt like 'do or die.' You see, I've been going to seven-day sesshins for many years right on top of my birthday in late September or early October. Each year I would try very hard and practice diligently. But like a scene from *Same Time Next Year* or *Groundhog Day*, something just didn't quite click. Or should I say stick? The initial post sesshin glow would fade away into a dim, tarnished memory. The habits would come back, and the terrible angst and pace of life would eat away most of the sesshin daylight. Like the characters played by Alan Alda or Bill Murray in these movies, I was ready to break out of relived old dreams of reality. Practicing hard, trying new and different things at Chapin Mill, I went for it as best I could. By the end of a powerful sesshin, however, still no breakthroughs. Again.



Tom Kowal



Arnold Park

Saturday after sesshin, I arrived back at Arnold Park to stay the night and savor the famous brunch and gleeful company on Sunday morning. I settled cozy and warm into the bedroom and ready for a good night's rest. Por la madrugada, something different took shape. It wasn't a dream at all. Terrible stomach pains moved over my abdomen convulsing and torsioning until it took my breath away. Were these stomach pains the flu or indigestion? I focused every ounce into these pains and with it began to push my stomach muscles up and down like rising and falling ocean currents. It brought up associations with giving birth as I contorted and rode waves of pain. Then it happened. The pain began to shift into transformed, powerful pinpricks of energy. It first shot through my stom-

ach and moved into my heart, where it churned around and seemed to clean house leaving me feeling de-cluttered and fresh as if opening a window to let the spring breeze blow in. Next it traveled into the right leg and down to the top bone of the right toe. Then these pricks of energy moved up and down the right leg. I could feel them doing their work, this scrubbing, healing work of thousands of tiny entities, miners hauling and chipping away unneeded stuff. It reached back into the stomach again with the same force and I felt most of the stomach pain give way. Then it went back into the heart. I breathed into mu with a thankfulness and earnestness usually reserved for a small child saved from falling or a starving person receiving food. I arched my back and opened my mouth such was the power of this breathing and energy. It rose to my head, right between the eyes into the middle of my forehead. Breathing and arch-

ing my back I held firm to mu. Tunneling light moved forward, ever forward into circles and circles of deeper darker lighted paths. It pulled onward with a massive, traveling momentum. I felt an incredible forward movement as you would riding a roller coaster, except I was completely aware of not moving at all. It stopped and ended in an instant ... almost as if a light switch turned on, then off. I could have sworn something in me had been 'rebooted.' Version 2.0 installed.

Big tears of gratitude rolled down my checks. What came over me was the recognition that I was not alone, not even remotely. These tiny pin-pricks of energy, these entities and this careful tending by unseen beings were going on within me. Utterly exhausted and yet covered

with a full set of armor from this experience, I fell to into a painless, protected sleep.

The next morning rather than wake up the house, I meditated at the head of the dokusan line just outside my bedroom. Above the student bell sat a picture of none other than Bodhidharma, the great ancestor-founder of Zen, who brought the dharma from India to China. How wonderful and auspicious! Here pictured above me stood a fellow traveler who made his way from West to East (and some say back again to India later in his life) for the benefit of us all. I felt tremendous reverence for the many beings before and since who have struggled mightily and continue to sacrifice in order to help light paths across dark and vast stretches of dreams.

Celebrating Practice and the Tradition that Upholds It

SENSEI KANJA ODLAND

Editor's Note: On the thirtieth anniversary of Zenbuddhistiska Samfundet, one of the teachers reflects on the history of our Scandinavian Sangha.

On the 15th of September 2012, we celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of Zenbuddhistiska Samfundet. We spent a year preparing for that day, and that effort itself was an important part of the celebration. The group of people who were living and training at Zengården full time did most of the practical preparations, but many others pitched in too, coming to Zengården for two special work weeks or at other times. It was really a shared effort, as well as a shared joy. We also used the anniversary as an opportunity to attend to things in need of repair at Zengården. During the spring and summer, roofs and floors were fixed, windows and doors were painted, shower rooms received a face lift, a fence was

built by the parking lot, as well as many, many other things. In the weeks before the anniversary when we discussed the outdoor decorations, I said that we should aim for a 'Moominvalley atmosphere.' And anyone who participated in the anniversary might agree with me that we succeeded in fulfilling that aim! The red solar-powered lanterns swung in the trees, colourful banners flapped in the wind, the white-and-yellow striped tent glowed in the dark of night. Soya sausages sizzled on the fire, and last but not least, a big bunch of different characters were talking, eating, buzzing, singing, playing and dancing all day and all night long.

Someone said, 'This was a day of love-bombing' and someone else said, 'In the winter when things feel difficult and dark, I will remember this day and feel happy.' I agree, it could not have been more wonderful, and what warmed



Danne Eriksson

my heart the most was the happy and relaxed feeling that everyone seemed to share that day. The preparations needed to create something like this include not only the planning, cooking, fixing, decorating, planting, shopping, practicing instruments and ceremonies, but the many hours of dedicated sitting shoulder-to-shoulder in Samfundet's different zendos as well as all the zazen people do daily at home. Our zazen was surely the most important preparation to create something this wonderful together. A celebration like this is an outward expression of inner work: it shows the fruits of Sangha and long-term practice with others in a tradition.



Comings and Goings: Our History

Roshi Philip Kapleau, who would have been 100 years old in August of 2012, is the founder of our tradition. Formally, our *lineage* started with

him in Rochester, New York in 1966. After Roshi Kapleau's death in 2004, a long-time student and friend of his, author and Zen teacher, Rafe Martin, said the following in an article that appeared in *Sweeping Zen* (Fall 2004):

He had opened the gate of practice, and his immense love of the dharma had saved us from deeply painful lives. *The Three Pillars of Zen*—the now classic work that brought him into the public eye and led him to found the first Zen center in America headed by a Westerner—was published in 1965 when the world was in chaos, the Vietnam War still on. Most of us were only in our early twenties, and somewhat crazed. He stood at an ancient door, held it open wide, and said to us simply, 'Come in. Work hard. The dharma will never let you down.'

Roshi Kapleau's teachers were the two twentieth-century Japanese teachers Sogaku Daiun Harada Roshi and Hakuun Yasutani roshi. Roshi Kapleau broke with Yasutani in 1966,

before he received *Inka*, full transmission. In spite of this break, we are spiritually, if not formally, in the *line* of the Yasutani-Harada school of Zen, which is a tradition with its roots in both Soto and Rinzai Zen (the two main Zen schools in Japan). Through the years, many people have found the break between Roshi Kapleau and his teacher problematic. Some have claimed that Roshi Kapleau was never a 'real' Zen master because of this and that our Zen lineage is flawed. But who can say what is real and what is flawed? Roshi Kapleau himself never claimed that he received full Dharma transmission from Yasutani Roshi, only that he got permission to teach Zen, and so he did. In his teisho '*Roshi and His Teachers, Dharma Transmission and the Rochester Zen Center Lineage*,' Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede shares the following excerpt from Roshi Kapleau's afterword in his book *Zen: Dawn in the West*. Regarding his break with his teacher, Roshi Kapleau wrote:

Because of my teacher's opposition to this Westernizing of Zen, and for other reasons, it became increasingly difficult for me to continue as his disciple, and I asked leave to withdraw. It was a painful step, for the relation between a master and his disciple is an intimate one, closer in some respects than the parent-child relationship. But the break was inevitable. Whatever pain I may have caused my master Yasutani-roshi I deeply regret. I owe him and my other masters a debt of gratitude that is immeasurable. Indeed, the only way such an obligation can be requited is for me to faithfully pass on to others the essence of the teaching I was privileged to receive. I can only hope that during the past thirteen years I have in some measure accomplished this and thus begun to repay their benevolence. (From edited teisho transcript, January 8, 1995: <http://www.rzc.org/wpcontent/uploads/2012/01/Roshi-and-His-Teachers.pdf>)

For me personally this was never a problem. I heard some rumours of this situation in the beginning of my contact with Zen, but it didn't mean much to me and later on when I heard more about it, I already had my own experience of practising with both Roshi Kapleau and my other teacher, his successor Roshi Bodhin Kjol-

hede. My own experience told me that I could trust my teachers. This didn't mean that I liked everything about them. I could give you many examples of times when they irritated me, times when I didn't agree with them, times when I thought I knew better about a subject, and so on. But they have always been good Zen teachers, and they have always been good examples, in part because of their shortcomings and the fact that they didn't try to hide them. They never pretended to be something they were not and they have never behaved in a destructive or unethical way from what I know. My trust in them as Zen teachers and as people has always been strong and unwavering.

In 1979 Roshi Kapleau gave Toni Packer permission to teach, and in 1980 he left the responsibility for the center in Rochester to her, as he moved to New Mexico to start a Zen center there. But about a year later, Toni told him that she wanted to leave the Buddhist tradition. Roshi Kapleau now stood on the other side of things, being the teacher whose disciple wanted to leave. I never noticed any animosity between Roshi Kapleau and Toni Packer in anything they said or wrote, and even if Toni expressed strong criticism towards the Japanese-style Zen that was taught and practised not only in Japan but at the Rochester Zen Center, she didn't revile her teacher. She just followed her own heart, and in that sense she followed her teacher's example: like him, she was a bold person who couldn't compromise what she believed in. And Toni Packer took full responsibility for her actions: she stood up in front of the whole Rochester Sangha in several big meetings, answering all the questions they had about her decision to leave and the reasons for it. Many people were upset and it was a painful split, but Toni Packer became a spiritual teacher in her own right and has had many followers, some of them former students of Roshi Kapleau. I met her when she came to Zengården a couple of times in the 1990s, invited by the organisation Zenvågen, which rented Zengården for two of her week-long meditation retreats. When seeing Toni Packer and hearing her talks, it struck

me how much she resembled Roshi Kapleau. Her mannerisms, her way of walking and speaking, there was definitely something there that revealed the deep connection between them and I'm glad that I met her: it somehow felt like closing a circle. On top of the bookcase in the apartment where she stayed during her retreats at Zengården, there were a couple of framed photos of Roshi Kapleau and Shogaku Daiun Harada Roshi: those two old guys hadn't left her side completely.

People in Zen communities and groups come and go, some people leave because they need to do something different, others leave because their life changes, some come back again years later, others come to stay their whole lives and some live far away but still stay connected through the years. The Zen journey that has taken place since 1966 and during these past thirty years has not been without challenges, and as many know, the challenges don't necessarily diminish with time. But the way we approach the challenges, the ups and downs, the comings and goings, does change with time, practice and experience. Our practice deepens, opens and strengthens through the years, and as our relationship to both the easy and hard matures, we are not so easily thrown off-center by whatever we encounter, and we can accept changes as well as pain and loss. And ultimately the essence of Zen is of course to fully experience for oneself what is beyond easy and hard and comings and goings.



A New Zen Branch in the North

Many people came into contact with Zen and Roshi Kapleau through his book *The Three Pillars of Zen*. People read it in Europe, too, and in the fall of 1982 Roshi was invited to come to Sweden (he had been in Poland and Germany before that). This visit resulted in the formation of a Zen group in Stockholm affiliated with the Rochester Zen Center. This affiliation meant that the Stockholm group was visited by someone, a priest or teacher, from the Rochester Zen

Center every year from 1983 until the Sangha got its first Swedish teacher in the late 1990s. (Sensei Sante Poromaa became a teacher in 1998, and I became a teacher in 2001.) From 1986, the visiting teacher was Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede, who became Roshi Kapleau's successor. He came to Sweden twice a year for over fifteen years, and many Swedes, as well as other European students, went to Rochester for full-time training and sesshins through the years.

What started as a small sitting group in an apartment in the suburbs of Stockholm in 1982 grew and spread, and during the last two decades many Zen groups of different sizes have formed. In 2003, the name for the whole Sangha-organisation was changed from Stockholm Zen Center to Zenbuddhistiska Samfundet. At this point it was appropriate as well as natural to change the official name, as apart from the center in Stockholm we had three other Zen centers in Helsinki, Lund and Göteborg as well as several small sitting groups in Sweden and Finland. Now there are also sitting groups in Glasgow and Cologne affiliated with us. I also want to mention that Zenbuddhistiska Samfundet never started any groups: groups were usually started by one person or a group of enthusiastic Zen practitioners who had moved away from Stockholm or come around for sesshins and wanted to have others to practise with where they lived.

In 1990, Finnåkers gamla skola was bought by Stockholm Zen Center and its seventy-odd members. The name was changed to Zengården, and from the summer of that same year, all the sesshins as well as two-month summer training periods were held there. In 1995, a small group moved to Zengården to train full time and since then there has been a continuous full-time training program, with five to fifteen people living and training there year-round and many, many more coming and going. Now Zengården is the 'hub' in the Sangha-mandala, and we call it our 'head temple.' This, apart from the fact that it is our largest facility, is the reason why we decided to host the thirtieth anniversary celebration at Zengården. This rural Nordic Zen temple has become the meeting place for all the different



Danne Eriksson

Left to right: Sensei Kanja Odland, Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede, Sensei Sante Poromaa.

parts of our Sangha. Here we meet and practise together supported by the tall pines, the green moss and the calls of cranes passing over the roof of the zendo in the early mornings.



Taking Care of the Tradition

When planning this celebration we said that it should not just be about looking to the past, but looking at and celebrating the present—what we have right in front of us—as well as the future. But of course the past is very much included in the present and the future. The past is included in this moment, what happened in the past made all of this possible. In the first part of our meal chant we say: ‘This meal is the labour of countless beings, let us remember their toil.’ This is said to remind us of the fact that what we receive here and now comes out of the work done by countless beings in the past. In

the Buddhist teachings, one is reminded of this truth over and over, the interconnectedness of all life. We are who we are, and we act the way we do, based on our past, and what we are and do now will carry into the future. Our mind state, our thoughts, visions, and actions now will be the basis for what happens next. So when we look to the past and honour it, we create a vision for the future.

The Buddhist teacher, writer and environmental activist Joanna Macy says:

Saving life on this planet includes developing a strong, caring connection with future generations; for, in the Dharma of co-arising, we are here to sustain one another over great distances of space and time. The Dharma wheel, as it turns now, also tells us this: that we don’t have to invent or construct our connections. They already exist. We already and indissolubly belong to each other, for this is the nature of life. So, even in our haste and hurry and occasional discouragement, we belong to each other. We can rest in that knowing, and stop and breathe,

and let that breath connect us with the still center of the turning wheel. (<http://www.jo-annamacy.net/thegreatturning.html>)

If we have made up our mind to follow a tradition, we have to be careful about it otherwise the meaning of it will get lost. What does it mean to care about tradition? It should be inclusive and open. The Latin word *traditio* means transmission, and this is what tradition is about. But keeping a tradition is a balancing act that involves mind and body and demands clarity and precision as well as passion. It needs to be ordinary as well as visionary: it is built on practical reality as well as dreams.

At the ceremony that opened our anniversary celebration, we placed three incense sticks symbolising Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha in the incense pot on the altar. These sticks were put in the ashes left from all the incense burned during our zazen in the past thirty years. The effect of zazen, chanting, teisho, and ceremonies through the years is what upholds our practice in the present moment. And if we take good care of the legacy that the past generations left us, it will, like the ashes, continue to be something that upholds our practice in the future. When I started to practise at the Stockholm Zen Center, I was shown how to tap the ashes in the incense pot lightly and smooth them out with a bent spoon especially made for this purpose. It demanded focus and patient precision, and it was a Zen practice in itself. If it was done just right, not packed too hard or too loose, the incense sticks would stand upright and stable in the ashes. This exemplifies how we can relate to tradition: if the legacy and teachings transmitted to us have a smooth but firm 'consistency,' they will uphold our practice in a natural way. Taking traditional ways too seriously would be like packing the ashes too hard, so when we try to put new incense sticks into them the sticks might break. If the tradition is too conservative it will be counterproductive, even damaging. But

if we are too careless and don't uphold tradition at all, we won't have sufficient support and stability in our practice. If we don't take care of the ashes in the incense pot they will tend to get looser and looser, and the incense sticks will fall or lean to the sides, and the new ashes will fall outside the pot and get wasted, forgotten, or just seen as useless dust.

Roshi Philip Kapleau was a person who never gave up his conviction that everyone, ordinary people from all walks of life, can awaken to their True Self, their own deepest essence, the essence of reality. As he saw it, the two arenas needed for sincere Zen practice are: the daily life practice and daily zazen—and the possibility to do sesshin and full-time training at least occasionally for those inclined to do so. He also believed in keeping the strength of the traditional ways as well as changing things according to circumstances without 'throwing out the baby with the bath water' as he used to say. Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede has kept his teacher's Zen legacy alive by continuing and refining this work for more than twenty-five years, and this is what we try our best to do as well.

I bow in deep gratitude and thank my teachers, and I bow to everyone else who has made this celebration possible: Sangha leaders, zendo leaders, board members, cooks, carpenters, housekeepers, web designers, gardeners, treasurers, travel agents, and many, many others. Lastly, reflecting upon the saying that the quality of the students is a sign of the teachers' qualification—even though we, the teachers, surely have made many mistakes in the past and will make many new ones, seeing our Sangha during the thirtieth anniversary celebration, I can only come to the conclusion that we must have done *something* right!

Sensei Kanja Odland is a priest and co-teacher at Zengården, an affiliate of the Rochester Zen Center and part of the Cloud-Water Sangha.

Planned Giving for the Novice

CECILY FUHR

Has this ever happened to you? You get to the part of *Zen Bow* where there's a little box telling you about all the wonderful ways you can give to the Center via annuities, charitable remainder trusts, and 'other financial vehicles,' whatever that means (I tend to think of little Hot Wheels cars with dollar signs on them, though that may just be me), and immediately your eyes start to glaze over, and your ears fill with a dull roaring sound, and the world around you fades away, until you turn the page and suddenly see a really juicy article on the super-horrible/super-awesome sesshin experience of one of your friends, and then you dive in and forget all about all that financial stuff. Does that happen to you? It happens to me, and I'm a nerd who got an A in Taxation of Personal Income in law school. Please don't feel bad.

There's a very easy way to put the Zen Center in your post-mortem-money-distribution plans that will take you about 5 minutes to set up and will not cost you anything until you are dead. No remainder-annuity-Hot-Wheels-Car required. No lawyer required, either. Here's how ...

Do you have a retirement account? An IRA, or a 401(k), or one of those other things that involves convoluted paperwork from your em-

ployer that you must sign every year? That account undoubtedly has a beneficiary on it, and that beneficiary can be adjusted, usually via a mere 5 minutes of your Internet time. (If you don't have Internet access to the account, you can get a quick-and-easy form from Human Resources that'll do the trick.) Put down 'Rochester Zen Center' and you're done. When you keel over, the Center will inherit the account (or whatever percentage of the account that you specify), and you can feel pleased with yourself in the meantime.

'But wait!' you may say. 'What about my children/aging parents/beloved gerbil Fluffy? I can't disinherit my loved ones!' Of course you can't! Fortunately, beneficiary designations aren't an all-or-nothing deal. You can designate multiple beneficiaries and the specific percentages of the account for each one. Want to leave 10 percent to your no-goodnik kids, 10 percent to the RZC, and 80 percent to ever-faithful Fluffy? No problem! It's easy to figure out, easy to set up, and easy to change as your circumstances change.

So there you have it. Beneficiary designation: the planned giving option for the rest of us. Now, my lawyer-averse friends, you have no excuse. Go do it!

Countless Good Deeds.

If you're thinking about financial planning, estate planning, or both, please remember that there are myriad ways you can help the Rochester Zen Center through planned giving. The right kind of plan can help you reduce your taxes significantly while providing for a larger, longer-lasting gift to the Zen Center. Because there is a wide array of bequests, annuities, trusts, and other financial vehicles to consider, you'll want to work with your financial advisor to decide what's best for you. Long-time Zen Center member David Kernan, an attorney who concentrates his practice in tax law, has generously offered to help point you in the right direction at no charge. For more information about planned giving and David's offer, please contact the Center's receptionist.



*Youth Group Poetry Walk at
Chapin Mill*

The Zen Center youth group came together for a sleep-over at Chapin Mill this past November. Six of the youngest children ventured outside on a poetry walk to describe all the nature that surrounded them. Led by volunteer Dana Lundquist, the young poets rambled across rustic bridges and through groves of trees, and enthusiastically found words for everything they encountered. With the help of some of the teenagers, these young poets were able to write down their reflections on paper for us to enjoy.

Buddha statue, river, swing, trees,
red, brown, blue
Walking, I saw the snow coming down
Brown bridge was covered with snow,
but it melted.

—*Aden with assistance from Noah*



The bridge of the house,
that's over the water fall,
that comes from the lake,
where snakes are baked
and the Buddha ate them.
—*Quinton with assistance from Gabe*

Snow was drifting from the sky,
as fall leaves come down.
The cold water slithers down the stream.
The trees sway in the breeze.

—*Scout*



Mishka snow princess.
Her fur is like snow.
Over the little bridge is a little lake.
She licked my hand.

—*Miriam*



Snow, tree house
cold
pond
wet
blue
wide

—*Fiona with assistance from Daria*



Mishka the white dog like snow.
Lots of leaves on the ground
red, green, yellow.
—*Gabrielle with assistance from Stephanie*

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Coming Out as a Buddhist

It's not always easy to talk openly about being a Buddhist in a cultural setting where Zen Buddhism is sometimes represented as an exotic religion or cult, a minimalist approach to aesthetic design, or a blissful state of being obtained by washing your hair with a certain brand of shampoo. Yet, there are points in our practice where we may find it necessary to 'come out' as a Buddhist to our family members, friends or coworkers. On what occasions have you come out as a Buddhist? How did you go about explaining your practice and its place in your life? What challenges, if any, did you encounter?

Readers are invited to submit articles and images to the editors at zenbow@rzc.org.

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